

I am writing to urge that, in the course of the 2002 Biennial Review, no action be taken that would weaken the requirements set forth in Part 255 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. As a person who is totally blind, I am particularly concerned with accessibility of features commonly found on modern conventional and cellular phone equipment and pagers. In my experience many major features of modern telephones are not currently accessible to blind users. In some cases limitations of current technology make such accessibility not readily achievable at present. In other cases the manufacturer simply has not provided the accessibility whether or not it was readily achievable.

Some of the features that are often unavailable to blind users are:

On-screen menu systems for telephone set-up.

Caller ID and Caller ID with Name.

Telephone directories built into both cellular and conventional phones.

Roaming information for cellular phones.

Battery and signal indicators for cordless and cellular phones.

Digital/analog indicators for cellular phones.

Assorted text messaging, web phone, and other text/graphics-based displays.

Many of the above features are important to blind users. Caller ID can help a cellphone user decide whether a call is worth answering and committing air time charges to. Roaming indicators are important in determining whether extra charges will be incurred when using a cellphone in a particular area. Build-in phone directories are especially important to blind users who do not have full access to conventional telephone directories. The digital/analog indicator on a cellphone gives important information on whether service is likely to be reliable and/or secure from eavesdropping.

I am concerned that, unless regulations remain in place and people with disabilities continue to have the opportunity to voice their concerns and complaints about inaccessible telecommunications equipment, there will not be sufficient incentive for manufacturers to commit to providing access to everyone regardless of disability.